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Outline Of Reference Paper On:

COMPLICATIONS IN THE KREMLIN

What is afoot in the Kremlin? This question was asked by observers of the Soviet scene as the December plenary session of the Party Central Committee on agriculture -which has bid fair to become a tradition- was postponed until sometime in January. The poor 1960 harvest can be discounted as the reason for the postponement, as Soviet officials are used to coping with perennial agricultural shortcomings.

A more likely reason is that sweeping changes in the administration will have to be made to improve agriculture. The finger of blame is pointed, never at the system but at the human element. Last year, First Secretary of the Kazakh Communist Party, Nikolai I. Belyayev, was blamed for the crop disaster in Kazakhstan; this year it may be the Minister of Agriculture, Vladimir V. Matskevich.

That something is brewing in the Kremlin is indicated by the undue publicity given Frol R. Kozlov and by the important role of Anastas I. Mikoyan at official functions.

An unmistakable sign of complications in the Soviet hierarchy was the absence of Premier Khrushchev from all the meetings held to mark Sino-Soviet friendship. Mikoyan excused his boss as being down with influenza, but the Soviet press reported the Premier as receiving visitors throughout the period he was reported ill by the Western press.

The December plenary session was to have fixed the date for the Twenty-second Party Congress sometime in 1961, but now it appears that the Soviet leaders are unable to hold the plenum, much less the larger meeting.

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COMPLICATIONS IN THE KREMLIN

Portents of a power shift in the hierarchy and of major organizational changes have appeared on the Soviet horizon. The expected moves are seen as the storm to clear the air for the formulation of the new Party line and for the Twenty-Second Party Congress.

The postponement of the December 13 plenary session of the Party Central Committee until January, 1961, is one such portent. The plenum was to be devoted to the results of the 1960 agricultural year and to problems of the future development of agriculture, such as the fulfillment of the new "socialist obligations." A December plenum on agriculture is now almost traditional in the USSR, but the report of the postponement did not give any reasons for the delay nor the exact date of the January plenum.

It would be incorrect to explain the postponement solely by the poor 1960 harvest. Agricultural shortcomings are nothing new in the Soviet Union. The failures noted at the 1959 plenum were repeated this year on a larger scale. A more likely reason is that sweeping organizational and personnel changes have to be made to improve agriculture.

In December 1959 the discussion of the general profitability of the virgin lands--pivotal real estate in Khrushchev's agricultural policy--almost ended tragically for the First Secretary. By deflecting the criticism at the last moment to the Central Committee Presidium member and First Secretary of the Kazakh Communist Party Nikolai I. Belyayev, Khrushchev managed to avoid an awkward situation. Judging by the Soviet press, this year's scapegoat is to be Minister of Agriculture of the USSR, Vladimir V. Matskevich, for whom the outlook is dreary: Areas which have not been harvested in time are now under snow. Weeds, too, have caused major losses in some regions, often reducing the harvest by nearly one half (Selskaya Zhizn, Farm Life, November 24, 1960). The Soviet press has had enough to say about the shortcomings in the virgin lands and has admitted that the reason is not the weather, but poor organization, bad management, and lack of leadership (Komsomolskaya Pravda, Nov 27, 1960). The failure to fulfill plans

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for output of livestock and of cereals has led to a wave of criticism by the Soviet press of over-all planning of agricultural policy (Komsomolskaya Pravda, November 18, 1960). See Analysis Service No. 10, 1960/61.

The January plenum will not restrict itself to agriculture however. It is bound to discuss the re-orientation of Soviet foreign policy and the future role of the Party in the world Communist movement in the light of the declaration of the Moscow conference of 81 Communist Parties. Khrushchev will now have to explain to top Party, state and military figures the reasons for the failure of his policy and for ideological concessions to the Red Chinese. The Kremlin, which once dictated its will to the Comintern, is now just another "equal" member of the socialist camp, occupying a position which is off the course from the political line implemented since the Twentieth Party Congress. See Analysis Service No. 12, 1960/61.

Forthcoming changes in the balance of forces in the Kremlin are foreshadowed in the Soviet press. On December 6, 1960, Pravda published a report on the departure from Leningrad for Moscow of the Second Secretary of the Communist Party Frol R. Kozlov. He was seen off by all the top Leningrad Party figures. Such a report on what is in fact an unimportant journey is usually reserved for the Party First Secretary. The publicity given Kozlov's send-off suggests that his influence is on the rise. Attention must be paid also to Anastas I. Mikoyan, who has attended the various celebrations and seen guests off.

The most important sign of possible complications in the Kremlin was the absence of Khrushchev from all the meetings held to mark Sino-Soviet friendship. He was not present at the railroad station on December 6 to welcome back the Communist Chinese delegation from visits to Leningrad and Minsk. Khrushchev further missed: a gala performance at the Bolshoi theater, December 6; a meeting in the Palace of Sports, December 7; a luncheon given by President Liu Shao-chi, December 7; a reception held in the Kremlin for the Chinese delegation, December 7; the send-off for the delegation, December 8. The Western press noted that Khrushchev was down with influenza. The source of this story was Mikoyan's statement at the Kremlin reception that the indefatigable Khrushchev "has difficulties with influenza, and influenza is stronger than human will power." Mikoyan suggested that the doctors had advised Khrushchev to cancel all official duties for the time being. However, throughout the period of Khrushchev's illness, the Soviet press reported that he had received visitors. On December 6 his family was visited by United States industrialist Cyrus Eaton and Mrs. Eaton; on December 7 he received Liu Shao-Chi; and on December 8--Vice-Premier Marshal Amer of the United Arab Republic.

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One begins to wonder whether Khrushchev's illness did not perhaps have a political pathology. He possibly did not wish to participate in the celebrations after the Moscow declaration had ignored his foreign policy line.

The Soviet press itself said absolutely nothing about Khrushchev's illness. Even the news stories on the reception, at which Mikoyan was reported by Western correspondents as having stated that he had influenza, had nothing to say about his illness. His absence from the celebrations and reports that he had nonetheless received visitors must have made the Soviet people wonder what might be brewing in the Kremlin. If we remember that the Kremlin never does anything without a purpose, we can presume that there are to be changes in the balance of forces at the top. A further striking note is that at all the receptions Leonid I. Brezhnev ended his speeches with a toast to Mao Tse-tung, while Liu Shao-chi toasted Khrushchev. However, after his meeting with Khrushchev on December 7, Liu Chao-chi did not answer Brezhnev's toast to Mao with one to Khrushchev.

The forthcoming plenary session will presumably fix the date for the Twenty-second Party Congress, which is to be held in 1961. Judging by the events in the world Communist movement and by their influence on political stability inside the USSR, the Soviet leaders are at present ready to hold neither a congress nor even the much smaller plenum. Prior to the congress the Kremlin must solve at the plenum level the problem of the distribution of forces at the top and must establish the main lines of Soviet domestic and foreign policy. Evidently the congress will not meet until late in the year since official preparations need time and cannot begin until the official announcement is made. The important internal preparation, carried out unofficially by the Central Committee Secretariat for several months, has been paralyzed as a result of the Moscow Conference and concomitant internal disagreements.

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